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AUTHOR Foss, Paul C.; And Others
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ABSTRACT

Research suggests that effective organizational change must be led by line personnel rather than by outside consultants. The Performance Management Program (PMP) implemented in two Bell Telephone companies is a line-led, self-help program in which managers participate in problem-solving activities within their own jobs. Marketing and sales managers (N=247) were divided into treatment and control groups and completed several job satisfaction scales before and after the PMP training program. Data were also obtained on sales productivity over a one-year period. There were no significant differences between sales data in the control and treatment groups of both companies during the months prior to the implementation of the training program. Over a five-month post-treatment period, statistically significant increases in sales productivity were observed in the treatment groups of both companies. Job satisfaction declined slightly for the treatment groups; these results were interpreted as reflecting a more task-focused climate during the post-training period. (Author/NRB)

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PROBLEM-SOLVING MANAGEMENT TRAINING EFFECTS ON SALES PRODUCTIVITY & JOB SATISFACTION

Paul C. Ross
Patricia D. Tighe
C. P. Westover
American Telephone & Telegraph Co.

John C. Houtz
Fordham University

Robert A. Denmark
Hofstra University

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Problem-solving Management Training Effects on Sales Productivity and Job Satisfaction

Blake and Mouton (1979) have called attention to the difficulty that organization development practitioners have had bringing about and sustaining organizational change. They have suggested that such change requires participation of the entire organization and must be led by the "line" personnel rather than by outside consultants or "experts." They suggest that managers, for example, engage in "self-help" activities to bring about significant improvement in the organization.

The Performance Management Program (American Telephone & Telegraph Co., 1978) was designed as a participative, line-led, self-help program in which managers utilize systems-based problem solving activities within their own jobs. The program consists of a skill development workshop and a continuing structure aimed at ensuring that the skills are applied within the local organization. The present research examines the effectiveness of the program applied in 2 Bell Telephone Companies involving four southern states. Measures of job satisfaction and company sales productivity were selected as the most relevant means by which to evaluate the program's impact.

Methods and Procedures

Subjects

The subjects in this research were marketing and sales managers in 2 Bell Telephone Companies. The organizations were self-elected participants and the selection of control and treatment groups was made

by the local operating company headquarters staff. One city-wide area in each company was designated as control and one city-wide area in each company was designated as treatment. While random assignment was not employed, treatment and control selections were made to balance staff sizes, market characteristics, and service areas. 247 managers participated.

Instruments

Three separate survey measures of job satisfaction were employed: the Job Descriptive Index (Smith, Kendall, & Hulins, 1969), the Job Diagnostic Survey (cf: Suzansky, 1974), and the Job Dimension Checklist (Suzansky, 1974). Each of these instruments has demonstrated satisfactory (greater than .70 or .80) reliability, but there are both common and distinct aspects of the work environment assessed. All 3 instruments were used to provide the widest possible basis for program evaluation.

Financial Data

Financial data were tabulated on a monthly basis within the existing operating measurement system. Sales revenue was selected because it is regarded as the measure most sensitive to the activity of the full sales force. The index of sales results used in this study was computed each month by comparing the revenues received by the end of the month with that received during the corresponding month of the previous year.

Description of the Performance Management Program

The PMP is a delivery and support system involving at least 3 levels of management. First, there is a briefing and multi-media presentation to enlist commitment and support from upper management. Next, a training plan is developed for all supervising managers in the participating organization. Higher level supervisors/managers are trained first. A "coordinator" is selected from among the managers who is then trained to administer workshops and act as a local consultant. Finally, target groups of participant managers are involved in series of program activities.

The "coordinators" meet with the managers post workshops. In these meetings, local problems are defined, prioritized, and resources needed for their solution are committed. Another set of activities are aimed at "folding" the problem solving process into the local management structure. These activities include the writing and circulation of newsletters reporting significant applications of the process. The objective of these activities is to foster recognition and reward for individual managers and communication among all levels of management so that the full resources of the organization can be made available if one level of management cannot deal with the problem at hand.

Implementation of the Program

The implementation of the PMP occurred in several steps. First, briefings were conducted for the headquarters staff in each participating company. These meetings reviewed earlier applications of PMP, the modifications made for the specific sales organization, and the study plan. Next, general managers of the treatment groups were briefed. The

nature and resources required of the PMP were discussed. A "coordinator" was then selected and trained to be a workshop leader and program consultant. This training took three weeks (15 full days).

The first training session was conducted for the general manager and key subordinates by the principle authors. All subsequent training was performed by the resident consultant ("coordinator"). These subsequent workshops were programmed so that supervisors were trained before their subordinates or at the same time. The training phase was conducted between April and the end of June. Following each workshop, the consultant met with the managers to identify and analyze problems. These meetings and subsequent on-going program activity continued throughout the entire post-training period.

Data Collection

Pre-measures of job satisfaction were obtained on the first day of the training sessions. The post-measures were collected via mailings begun approximately 5 months after training had been completed. Sales productivity data were recorded monthly for a 5-month period prior to training and for the 5-month period beginning at the completion of the training phase. The training period lasted approximately 2 months.

Interviews

An independent contractor conducted structured interviews of employees prior to and following training. Information was obtained concerning morale. The employees were not informed of the nature of the study, however. In the post round of interviews, descriptions of "critical incidents" involving problem solving attempts were obtained. These data were also analyzed by the authors.

Results and Discussion

Sales Productivity

Analyses of variance were computed on sales results comparing treatment and control groups and pre- and post-treatment months. There were no significant differences in either company between sales data in the control or treatment groups during the months prior to the implementation of the training program. During the post-treatment months, however, significant differences in both companies in favor of the treatment groups were observed. In Company A, the main effect for pre-to-post differences (F = 9.47; df = 1, 16; p .01), the main effect for group (F = 10.99; df = 1, 16; p .01) and the interaction effect (F = 11.05; df = 1, 16; p .01) were all significant. In Company B, the interaction effect (F = 18.26; df = 1, 16; p .01) was significant.

In both companies, the treatment group had significantly larger sales results in the post program period. In both companies, the control group showed a slight to moderate decline in monthly sales. The increase in sales for the treatment groups amounted to a monthly average in Company A of $1.74 million and Company B of $1.26 million, whereas control group declines ranged from $70,000. to $670,000.

Job Satisfaction

Factor analyses were computed using the measures of job satisfaction obtained prior to treatment. On the basis of these analyses, it was decided to use the JDI only as a total score and the JDS was rescored using a revised structure of 14 factors. The JDC yielded 2 scores, one for employee ratings of his/her actual job and one for the "ideal" job

situation. These 18 measures of job satisfaction, then, were used in the post-treatment analyses.

Although analyses of variance on these 17 measures did yield some significant differences between treatment and control groups, one could not characterize these findings as indicating substantial impact on measured levels of satisfaction. Nine of the 17 factors showed statistical significant, but only one factor showed the same directional change for both companies. A factor of the JDS which has been labeled Agent Feedback was found to decline significantly in both treatment groups from pre- to post-treatment periods. Control groups showed little change on this factor.

The other changes pre- to post-treatment were unique to each company. However, in all cases the trend is downward in ratings by treatment subjects. An examination of the average ratings on each item of the various measures suggests relatively moderate to high satisfaction throughout both the treatment and control groups in pre- and post-surveys.

Implications of the Findings

While the results of the present study show considerable impact on sales productivity, there appears to be a modest decline in scores on job satisfaction measures. The specific factors which showed the greatest decline included: overall satisfaction, job/task variety and importance, and supervisor interaction and feedback. One might suggest, however, that what is reflected by the declines is not job dissatisfaction but rather a changing work climate. What may have been seen by employees in the pre-treatment period as a comfortable, casual job may have been increasingly seen in the post-program period as more pressured and task-oriented, where more independence is expected.

The interview data provide some additional support for this hypothesis. Grant (1979) has noted that participants in the treatment groups show a shift towards greater sensitivity to business problems and less tendency to view the customer as the cause of the problem. One may suggest that the treatment groups are more willing to tackle problems with the expectation that solutions can be found or resources necessary can be acquired.

The measure of sales productivity was a general one, and it is likely that some of the improvement was due to factors unrelated to the PMP. However, the critical incident data describing post-treatment activities showed that considerable potential for impact on productivity has come out of the program. Some of these activities included the creation of the task force to analyze deficiencies in the types of information gathered by the sales force. Another group examined the reasons for an apparent decline in the quality of written proposals, and a third group identified problems in supervision that were referred to the headquarters staff.

In summary, the behaviors of the line managers after training show 2 predominant themes: task forces of interested managers were formed to work through common problems and the problems identified could be characterized as highly task-focused and presumably related to productivity and performance in the overall organization. To conclude, the results of the present study support the view that problem solving training delivered within an adaptive support system aimed at facilitating transfer of training can substantially impact sales productivity. The impact of such a program on job satisfaction, however,

must be viewed more cautiously. Measured satisfaction may decline in response to the increased task related activity presumably arising from more active problem solving behaviors on the part of management.

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